

The Transition: An Updated Strategy for the Global War on Terror

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The Transition: An Updated Strategy for

the Global War on Terror

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To

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*And one should bear in mind that there is nothing more difficult to execute, nor more dubious of success, nor more dangerous to administer than to introduce a new order of things; for he who introduces it has all those who profit from the old order as his enemies, and he has only lukewarm allies in all those who might profit from the new.*¹

-Niccolo Machiavelli
The Prince

*When the enemy advances, we withdraw,
When the enemy rests, we harass,
When the enemy tires, we attack,
When the enemy withdraws, we pursue.*²

-Maoist Guerilla Folk Rhyme

Introduction

The United States, along with many other nations of the world, is facing the distinct possibility of a protracted Islamic insurgent war in Iraq. A failed Iraqi state will result in the establishment of a sanctuary for terrorists worldwide, something the National Commission of Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States said must not occur.³ The continued use of conventional military force to engage and destroy an insurgency hiding amongst a civilian population is ineffective and will not result in a decisive victory. *Therefore, a new integrated and unconventional political, military, and economic solution must be implemented in Iraq if a decisive result is to be achieved.*

Part I: Why Conventional Offensive Force is Ineffective and not Decisive in a Global Insurgency

-The Inevitable Transition

According to *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication-1, Warfighting*, a doctrine based on Clauswitzian military principles, "Not only can the offense not sustain itself indefinitely, but also it generally grows weaker [through the expenditure of lives, resources, equipment, etc.] as it advances."⁴ Once the offense reaches its culminating point,

a certain point of weakness at which the offense can no longer be sustained, a transition to the defense is imperative for force reconstitution. Sound military judgment dictates making this transition *before* the culminating point is reached, as the offense is most vulnerable to counterattack at or beyond this point.⁵ Increased operational and personnel tempo, the growing fiscal expense of maintaining and equipping a conventional military force in combat, and more importantly, the 20% decline in political will of the American people for the administration's Iraq policy⁶ are just a few of the indicators the United States is reaching its political, military, and economic culminating point. America must have a viable strategy to continue the fight when this transition occurs.

-Imperialism: Perception is Reality

An imperialist perception, acquired through a unilateral military approach, degrades what Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government calls America's "soft power", its ability to exert considerable influence on current or future foreign alliances through its diplomatic, military, and economic credibility.⁷ This ability to exert "soft power" is critical to gaining allies

to fight the insurgency.* This fight is an international problem and if used as a unifying principle in diplomacy, presents America with an opportunity to develop a conventional multi-lateral military strategy to defeat the insurgency in Iraq.

According to Nye, "The United States and other advanced democracies will win [this global insurgency] only if moderate Muslims win, and the ability to attract the moderates is critical to victory."⁸ A *perceived* imperialistic and prolonged military occupation of a country or territory, despite any altruistic motives for doing so, makes it very difficult to attract moderates to ones cause and therefore defeat an insurgency with a conventional military campaign. Two different though relevant historic examples of conventional forces used to fight ideological insurgencies provide case and point:

1) Since 1967, Israel's military occupation in the Palestinian territories has been unable to culturally dislodge and decisively defeat an ideologically based

* The strength of an insurgent enemy is in his apparent military and political weakness. This apparent weakness, when attacked by a stronger political or military force, provides the insurgent with "persecution" propaganda to further the imperialist image of their enemy. This image denies their enemy the ability to cultivate credible diplomatic alliances throughout the world. This strategy is also designed to attack and degrade the political will of their enemy's civilian population and place political pressure on the leaders of that country to abandon the fight against the insurgency.

insurgent enemy (Hamas and Islamic Jihad).

2) Russia's invasion of Afghanistan in 1978 ended in a military and political embarrassment after ten fruitless years of fighting leaving almost fifteen thousand troops missing or dead with an astonishing 469,685 casualties. ⁸

-The Problem of Intelligence

In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu states, "...the reason the farsighted ruler and his superior commander conquer the enemy at every move...is foreknowledge." ¹⁰ To conduct an effective conventional offensive strategy, *actionable intelligence* of the enemy is vital. Actionable intelligence is best derived from human sources. Again, according to Sun Tzu: "Such foreknowledge cannot be had from ghosts and spirits, deduced by comparison with past events, or verified by astrological calculations. It must come from people-people who know the enemy situation." ¹¹ A global Islamic insurgency is difficult to penetrate. The United States' intelligence services lack individuals with the requisite language and cultural skills necessary to embed themselves into Islamic society and operate in the austere, radical environments of the insurgency. In May 2004, former Director of Central Intelligence, George

Tenet, warned a rebuilding of the clandestine service to this capacity could take at least five years.¹² Without a sound human intelligence capability to locate and identify specific high value and high payoff targets, the United States' ability to develop and implement a decisive strategy based on conventional military operations is severely limited.

Part II: An Alternative Solution

-The Political and Diplomatic Front

In *On Guerilla Warfare*, Mao Tse-Tung states,

Without a political goal, guerilla warfare [in an insurgency] must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, cooperation, and assistance cannot be gained.¹³

An insurgency is tied to its political aims. Therefore, to successfully defeat an insurgency, its political aims must be discredited in the eyes of its supporters. As discussed, the exercise of conventional military power against an insurgency feeds the political aims of the insurgents solidifying its base of support and is therefore not a viable solution. Agile politics and diplomacy through the application of national "soft power" must be used to counter an insurgency during a military occupation. Some examples are provided:

-Local leaders must be allowed to take credit for public projects. Though the United States and its allies may provide the funds and materials, local leaders and the people of their communities should be engaged for the duration of a project. Local leaders must be allowed to lead in their communities without the United States seeming to usurp their authority in the eyes of the local population.

-Though many countries do not support the offensive stance the United States has taken in this insurgency, all efforts must be expended to engage other countries and have them commit resources to the rebuilding effort. Internationalizing this effort helps soften the imperialistic perception of the United States.¹⁴

-For homeland defense an expansion of the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Reform Act of 2002 must be considered. One element of this act denies non-immigrant visas to aliens of countries designated by the Department of State as "state sponsors of terrorism."¹⁵ Those countries are Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria.¹⁶ This list should be expanded to include a new category for individuals from "terrorist producing regions." Visa denial would not be automatic, but approval would certainly become more difficult.

-The Military Front

The United States must reframe its military actions in Iraq. Senators Joseph Biden and Chuck Hagel put the problem this way: "...a military occupation, even temporary, that includes only American and British soldiers could fuel resentment throughout the Middle East, bolster al Qaeda's recruitment and make Americans a target for terrorists everywhere." ¹⁷ Additionally, the United State's human intelligence capability is lacking and will not be rebuilt over night. Therefore, to reframe the military effort the following courses of action should be considered. Additionally, these actions could help change the face of the war and stem America's rapid approach towards its culminating point:

1) America should reduce its conventional force footprint in the main urban centers of Iraq. These forces should be repositioned to defend critical infrastructure sites throughout the country. Aggressive, large-scale offensive operations would be temporary and only used to seize large insurgent held areas. These actions should be quick and annihilating in character. This repositioning of forces should reduce the perception of occupation and show the local population the United States is a protecting force not an occupier.

2) A plan to replace conventional uniformed troops by a large-scale unconventional psychological grassroots operation to place "plain clothes" military units into communities should be executed. Although these units would not be in uniform, they would be armed, would live amongst the population, protect the neighborhoods, conduct business with local vendors, help rebuild infrastructure, help establish local democratic governments, and conduct other civil military type duties. Their primary mission would be to establish a grassroots intelligence network to identify and eliminate members of the insurgency.

3) The number of special operations teams designed to covertly track and eliminate insurgency targets should be increased. They should incorporate Kurdish Peshmerga, Iraqi security forces, and Shia militiamen to provide an Iraqi face on the effort.¹⁸

-The Economic Front

Economic action must perform two primary functions: provide a base of support to the government of Iraq for management of the country's civil needs, and provide local entrepreneurs with a reservoir of capital. Examples include:

-An expansion of the Iraq Project and Contracting Office. This organization, run out of the American Embassy in Baghdad, takes the lead in managing the massive infrastructure reconstruction effort in Iraq.¹⁹

-Establishment of a Small Business Administration-type organization providing loan and contracting programs similar to the Basic 7(a) Loan Program²⁰ and the Small Disadvantaged Business Certification Program process where Iraqi businesses would be granted a contract from the coalition for goods and services up to and including a certain amount²¹. These loans would be backed by the host nation government with silent backing by the United States and its coalition partners and handed out to properly vetted members of the local communities. Involving local tribal leaders in this action is vital to put a local face on the process and avoid the overt impression the United States and its coalition is providing the financial backing.

Conclusion

A victory in the war in Iraq is vital, but far from guaranteed. If history is any judge, conventional military power will not prove decisive but will continue to contribute to the further degradation of America's

credibility in the eyes of the Iraqi people and the world. Above all, this credibility must be restored and the Iraqis must be given hope in the principles America extols. This can only be done through a new integrated and unconventional political, military, and economic solution. This strategy is certainly not the complete solution to the "Gordian Knot" of Iraq, but an attempt to take a fresh and unconventional look at the problem. Ultimately, only the Iraqi people can defeat the insurgency, but the United States and its coalition partners must provide them the means to do so.

Notes

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4. United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting* (Washington, D.C., 1997) 34-35.
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